THROUGH THE WOODS

BY

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Through the Woods

A little tale in which there is more than meets the eye

By KATHERINE M. YATES

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THROUGH THE WOODS

"Open your eyes and shut your mouth," said the little brown Dream.

"Why, that isn't the way to say it!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Well, it's the way to keep you from snoring, anyhow," said the Dream.

"But I wasn't snoring," protested Marjorie.

"Are you in a position to know whether you were snoring or not?" asked the Dream.

Marjorie hesitated.

"Now, I'll tell you something," said the Dream. "It is a poor plan to start an argument unless you are positive that you are in just as good a position to hold an opinion as the fellow who has the other side of the question. Otherwise you are beaten at the start.

Marjorie bit her lip. "Well," she said, at last, "you didn't have the rhyme right, anyway."

"Why isn't it right?" asked the Dream.

"It's:—

'Open your mouth and shut your eyes
And I'll give you something to make you wise.'"

"Nonsense!" said the Dream. "If you'd try it the other way — 'Open your eyes and shut your mouth'— you'd find that you didn't need anything 'to make you wise.'"

Marjorie pondered for a moment. "Perhaps you are right," she said, finally. "I'm sure I've had more trouble through opening my mouth than I ever had through keeping it shut."

"I don't doubt it," said the Dream.

"And of course," went on Marjorie, "I see more with my eyes open, my thinking eyes, I mean, than I do with them shut."

The Dream nodded.

"But," she added, "the rhyme says that I'll be given something if I do the other way."

"Don't you ever believe it," said the Dream. "It says that, because 'wise' rhymes with 'eyes.' Don't you ever believe anything just because it sounds pretty and rhymes; and don't you ever believe that you'll get anything to make you wise while you have your mental eyes shut. If a plum lands anywhere near to that open mouth, it is pretty sure to hit one of

those closed eyes hard enough to set you to thinking."

Marjorie nodded her head several times. "I see," said she; "but then, it doesn't apply to me, for I always have my eyes open."

"Do you?" said the Dream, with a provoking grin.

"Why, of course I do," said Marjorie. "I see just about everything that's going on.

"You didn't see your brother a moment ago, when we passed him in the road."

"My brother!" exclaimed Marjorie. "Why, I haven't any brother!" and she looked all about and up and down the pleasant country road along which she now noticed, for the first time, that they were traveling.

"No?" said the Dream, aggravatingly. "Who is that sitting back there by the tree?"

Marjorie looked, and saw, a short distance behind them, a small boy sitting by the wayside with his face in his hands. He looked so pathetic and crouched so forlornly, that Marjorie turned and went back. "What is the matter?" she asked, as she approached him.

The boy looked up, and she saw that his face was weary and his mouth quivering with pain.

"I've walked a very long way," he said, "and I've miles and miles farther to go, and my shoes have given out, and there were sharp stones in the road, and my feet —" he bit his lip and dropped his face in his hands again.

Marjorie glanced at his feet and her face paled a little; then, resolutely, she sat down upon a log and began taking off her own shoes. The boy was much smaller than herself, and she saw that he could wear them easily. When she had removed them, she went softly and placed them close beside him, and then ran lightly away over the smooth grass of the wayside.

The Dream was waiting for her a little way down the road. "So you saw your brother, after all, did you?" he remarked.

"My brother?" said Marjorie. "Why, he isn't my brother! I never even saw him before."

"Isn't he your brother?" persisted the Dream. "Think a little."

Marjorie sat down by the roadside. She had come to the conclusion that it was always worth while to think when the Dream advised her to. After a while she looked up, and her face was very tender and sweet. "Yes," she

said, "he is my brother. The Good Father belongs to us both."

The Dream nodded. "You think quicker than you used to," he said. "Come, let's be moving on."

In a little while they came to a very rough and stony hill; but Marjorie, busily talking to the Dream, did not notice it particularly until they were more than half-way down it; then she stopped short and stared at her feet.

"What's the matter?" asked the Dream.

"Why, my shoes!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Well, what about them?" asked the Dream. "They look like very good shoes."

"But," cried Marjorie, excitedly, "I gave my shoes to the little boy! Where did these come from?"

The Dream shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know?" he said, carelessly. "Come, let's not loiter."

"But," persisted Marjorie, standing still, "I tell you I gave mine to the little boy."

"Well, what if you did?" said the Dream. "These are just as good, aren't they?"

"Yes—yes, indeed—they're better; they're perfectly new; but where did they come from?"

The Dream heaved a sigh and perched himself upon the top rail of the fence. "My dear," he said, "what is the difference where they came from? They are, unquestionably, intended for you, or they wouldn't be on your feet. What more do you want?"

"I want to know where they came from," reiterated Marjorie.

"Why?" asked the Dream, "if they are perfectly satisfactory?"

"Why, I — I want to understand," replied Marjorie. "I can't go on until I know."

The Dream made a funny little face. "You're a queer girl," he said. "You're not at all consistent."

"What do you mean?" asked Marjorie.

"Well, you have a watch, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, glancing at the little time-piece pinned to her dress.

"Does it keep good time?"

"Perfect," replied Marjorie.

"And do you understand all about its inside workings?"

Marjorie hesitated. "Why, there's a mainspring, and some other springs, and some wheels, and — "

"But you don't understand exactly how the mainspring, and the other springs, and the wheels, work together to make the watch say half-past three at exactly the right time?"

"N-no," said Marjorie.

"But you notice that it does it just the same, whether you understand the process or not."

"Yes," admitted Marjorie.

"And the fact that you don't understand doesn't stop the mainspring, nor the other springs, nor the wheels?"

"No."

"But you just depend upon it, and let the works take care of themselves?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, in this other matter, you know there's God, and His power, and His laws. Can't you depend upon Him to keep you from suffering when you do a kind action?"

"Ye-s-s," hesitated Marjorie.

"And supposing that you don't understand exactly the way that He brings things about, can't you place as much confidence in Him as you do in your watch? Because you don't quite understand how He does a thing, can't keep Him from doing it, can it?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Do you know," said the Dream, clasping his hands about his knees in his favorite attitude, "I have known people to ask God for something, and then sit down and say, 'Well, it can't come about in *this* way, and it can't come about in *that* way, and I don't see how it can come about in some other way,' and they would get so interested in contemplating the ways that it *couldn't* come, that when it did come, likely as not they were too much occupied to even see it."

"But," said Marjorie, "isn't it right to want to know the way that good things come to us?"

"It surely is," said the Dream; "but if you don't grasp the combination right off, don't just stand still in the middle of the road and worry about the good that's come to you, only because you don't yet know enough to understand exactly how it reached you. Take it, and use it, and study it, and gain confidence by it; and in the mean time don't loiter; but do the work that comes to your hand."

Marjorie walked slowly on. "'God works in a mysterious way,'" she murmured.

"It isn't really mysterious," protested the

Dream; "only you don't fully understand yet, any more than you do about your watch. It is all according to unvarying laws. When you do a good deed, you work according to those laws, and you can depend upon the result infinitely more surely than you can depend upon the works of your watch."

Marjorie nodded her head gravely. "I see," she said; "but you talk to me so differently from the way you used to."

"You're growing," said the Dream, "and—"

But Marjorie held up her finger. "Listen," she said, and presently they heard again the sound which had attracted her attention, and recognized it as a sob.

Marjorie peered over the railing of a small bridge which they were crossing, and down on the bank of the narrow stream she saw a little girl crying bitterly.

Marjorie ran down the bank. "What is the trouble?" she asked, sitting down beside the child.

"I've lost my hat," said the little girl, still sobbing. "It blew into the creek as I was crossing the bridge, and it must have floated down the stream, for I can't find it anywhere, and I don't know what to do."

"Have you far to go?" asked Marjorie, noticing that the child's face was already burned by the sun, and her eyes red from crying.

"Yes, more than three miles farther," sobbed the little girl, "and my eyes are so dazzled that I can scarcely see anything now."

"But the road is shady," suggested Marjorie.

"Oh, I can't go by the road!" cried the little girl. "It's twice as far that way, and I am tired out already. I have to go across the meadows, and the sun is dreadfully hot. I don't know what I shall do;" and she began sobbing harder than ever.

Marjorie took off her own hat. "I am going by the road," she said, "and it enters the woods just beyond the bridge, and is shady as far as I can see, so you may have my hat."

The child hesitated; but Marjorie laughingly placed it upon her head and scrambled hastily up the bank, waving her hand merrily from the top.

"So you found another of your relations, did you?" said the Dream, dropping nimbly from his perch upon the railing of the bridge, as she joined him.

Marjorie laughed happily. "My hair is thick,"

she said, putting her hand up to the crop of curls, and then she caught her breath. She still wore a hat.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Forgot about the returns, did you?" said the Dream.

"Yes," said Marjorie, softly, "I didn't think about expecting another, — and this is even prettier than mine," she added, examining the hat curiously and reverently; and then, with a little sigh, "I will be so glad when I understand."

Just beyond where the road entered the woods, they caught up with an old man who was walking very slowly and leaning heavily upon a cane. He was tall and thin, and he held his head high, although his steps were slow and his limbs trembled beneath him. Marjorie looked up with a bright smile, as they passed; but her expression suddenly sobered as she noticed the extreme pallor and weariness in his face. "He ought to rest," she said to the Dream. "Perhaps I can get him to," and she stopped and sat down upon a fallen tree.

As the old man approached, she arose to her feet. "Haven't you time to talk to me for a

little while?" she asked. "I'm going to rest for a few minutes, and I would like, so much, to have company."

The old man hesitated; but the bright little face was coaxing, and the log looked soft and mossy, so he smiled and sat down, heaving a deep sigh as his tired limbs relaxed.

"Have you come far?" asked Marjorie.

"Yes, a long, a very long way," said the old man.

"And are you near the end of your journey?" asked Marjorie.

"No," the old man shook his head somberly. "There are a great many miles still to go."

"Then why don't you ride?" asked Marjorie. "There is a stage passing every little while."

The old man did not reply for a moment, and a flush crept up over his pale face. "I — I am not prepared to pay for the trip," he said, at last, passing a trembling hand across his mouth.

Marjorie bit her lip, and her hand went into her pocket to where lay a big silver dollar and a bright little five-dollar gold piece. First her fingers touched the dollar; but only for an instant, and then they closed about the gold coin; but still she hesitated, looking into the old man's

face. At last she spoke, timidly. "Would you let me help you?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" inquired the old man, almost sharply.

"Why, I — I would like, so much, to have you ride, and I have money —"

But the old man interrupted her. "No," he said, coldly, and starting to rise, "I am not a beggar."

Marjorie caught his hand. "Oh, please don't be angry!" she cried. "I didn't mean to hurt you, I only wanted to be of some use. You could just think of it as a loan, you know, and pay it back by and by."

"I don't know when I could pay it back," said the old man, moodily. "Perhaps I never could, so it would be nothing but charity, after all. No, I cannot take it."

But Marjorie clung to his hand. "Listen just a minute," she said. "You could be paying it back all the time."

"How?" asked the old man.

"By doing things for people," said Marjorie. "There is always some one that we can help, you know; and if you would only let me do this for you, then you could pay me by doing something for some one else whenever you have

a chance; and then it wouldn't be what you call 'charity' at all."

The old man sat back on the log and looked at Marjorie, curiously. "You are a strange little girl," he said.

"And will you take it?" asked Marjorie, eagerly, holding out the gold piece.

"Yes," he said, very gravely, "I will take it as a loan, and I will pay a part of the debt every day of my life. I thank you for a great deal more than the gold piece, little one."

Marjorie patted the wrinkled hand. "Good-by," she said. "The stage will be along in a little while, and you had better rest here until it comes," and she kissed her hand to him as she ran to join the Dream.

Looking back a few minutes later, she saw the old man bend down from his seat and take up a little stray kitten and begin to feed it from a paper parcel that he carried, and she smiled softly to herself; and some time later, when the crowded stage-coach passed them, and the old man leaned out to wave his hand, she saw that on his knees he held a child whose tired little head rested against his shoulder.

"He will soon have the debt paid," said Marjorie, clapping her hands gently together.

"He will never have it paid," said the Dream.

"Why?" asked Marjorie, in surprise.

"Because," answered the Dream, "every kindness that he does, will so much more than pay for itself, that the debt to you will grow and grow, and never stop growing, although he should return to you ten thousand times the amount of money that you loaned him."

"Dear me, what a very rich person I am!" exclaimed Marjorie, smiling happily.

"Yes," said the Dream, "you made a very good investment; but you can't corner the kindness market. There's too much competition these days."

Marjorie laughed again. "I don't want to," she said. "The more there are in that business, the better."

Just then the sun went under a cloud, and the deep shade of the tall pine-trees, among which the road now wound, made the air seem chilly, and Marjorie took her cloak from her arm and began to put it on. As she did so, a sudden thought came to her, and she looked the cloak over, critically. She had never been

exactly pleased with it, and now it was a trifle too small for her, and she did not like to wear it. She thought of the pretty new hat and shoes, and glanced at the Dream guiltily; but he did not seem to be noticing, and she set her chin with a determined air, although her face was a trifle flushed.

They met several people as they walked along; but all seemed to be warmly dressed, and a little frown came between Marjorie's eyebrows.

Presently, however, they met a little girl who had no cloak; but her dress seemed warm, and she looked quite comfortable. Marjorie hurried up to her. "Aren't you cold?" she asked, beginning to unbutton her cloak.

"No," said the little girl, "I am not at all cold."

"But you have no cloak," urged Marjorie.

"I don't mind," said the little girl. "I'll soon be out of the woods, and my dress is warm."

"But you ought to have a cloak," persisted Marjorie.

"Well, I haven't one," answered the little girl, rather crossly.

"You may have mine," said Marjorie, holding it out to her.

The little girl looked surprised. "Don't you want it, yourself?" she asked. "Your dress is thin."

"I'd rather you'd have it," said Marjorie, hurriedly; and leaving it in the hands of the astonished little girl she ran after the Dream.

Neither of them spoke for some time after she had joined him, and Marjorie kept glancing down stealthily, in search of the new cloak. Presently she began to shiver. The Dream giggled. "Are you cold?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marjorie, in a very low voice.

"Why did you give away your cloak?" asked the Dream.

"The little girl had none," said Marjorie, in a still lower tone.

"And you wanted to do a kindness?" asked the Dream, with a funny little quirk at the corner of his mouth.

Marjorie was silent.

"Still learning things, aren't you?" asked the Dream.

"Yes," said Marjorie, her teeth chattering.

"What did you learn this time?"

Marjorie bit her lip for a moment, and her eyes were brimming when she answered, still in

a low voice: "That it isn't what you do, but the thought with which you do it, that makes a kindness."

The Dream nodded. "You're growing wiser every minute," he said.

"It's costing considerable," said Marjorie, with a shaky little laugh.

They walked on as rapidly as possible, and Marjorie tried to forget the cold by taking an interest in the flowers by the wayside and the squirrels and birds in the woods; and she had nearly succeeded when they came to a place where was being erected a beautiful rest-house beside the way. She stopped to admire the artistic carvings, and graceful arches, and the comfortable seats and fountains of cool water.

"Who is giving this building to the travelers?" she asked of one of the workmen.

"All who pass this way and wish to help," replied the man, pointing to a box standing upon a stone pedestal.

Marjorie approached the box, and looking within she saw a heap of bills and coins. Slipping her hand into her pocket, she drew out her big silver dollar and deposited it with the rest.

The Dream looked at her curiously when she

had rejoined him. "You gave your dollar, didn't you?" he asked, after a time.

"Yes," said Marjorie.

"And what do you expect in return? Five?"

Marjorie's lip trembled. "No," she said. "I don't care whether anything at all comes in return. I only wanted to help."

"Why," asked the Dream.

"Because the beautiful rest-house will be a comfort to so many, every one who comes this way, and the more beautiful it is, the more it will show the generosity and love of all of us. I gave to it because I loved to give to it.

"I guess you'll not lose anything this time," said the Dream, quietly.

A few moments later they came upon a group of children gathered about some one sitting upon a little knoll by the wayside. The "some one" was a very pretty little girl about five years old, whom they were petting and admiring; and as Marjorie approached, she found that they were all engaged in giving things to her. One had placed a great bunch of roses in her lap, and another had given a box of candy, and others ribbons and toys.

"Why are you giving her these things?" asked Marjorie.

"Oh, because she's so sweet," answered one of the children. "Isn't she pretty? and aren't her curls lovely? We've every one of us given her something. I gave her the ribbon off of my hair," and she looked at Marjorie expectantly.

Marjorie felt in her pocket; but there was nothing there that she could give, and now more of the children were looking at her. She put her hand to her neck where was the slender gold chain which she prized almost more than anything else that she owned. All of the children were looking at her now, so she unfastened the chain, and going forward she clasped it about the neck of the pretty little girl. It was far nicer than anything that the others had given, and Marjorie felt a little thrill of pride as she stepped back to see the effect; and then, while the other children were clapping their hands and kissing the pretty child, she turned away — with a lump in her throat.

As usual, she and her companion walked some distance in silence. Presently the Dream spoke. "Would you mind telling me why you did that?" he asked.

Marjorie hung her head. "Every one else was giving her something," she said.

"And you think that a good reason?" asked the Dream.

"No-o," said Marjorie.

"Do you expect another chain?" asked the Dream.

"No," said Marjorie, "I don't."

"She didn't need the chain, did she?" asked the Dream.

"No," said Marjorie; "but I just hated not to give anything when all the rest were giving. And she didn't even say 'Thank you,' either," she added, resentfully.

"I suppose that you like yourself better for having given it, though?" hazarded the Dream.

"No, I don't," said Marjorie. "It was the silliest thing I ever did, and I deserve to lose the chain."

"Yes," said the Dream, quietly, "I think you do. You seem to be foolish about some things still. Perhaps you are like certain folks I know, and if some one came along and gave you a big purple parasol that you didn't want and couldn't carry without trouble, you'd im-

mediately think you had to give her your dress, just to get even."

"I suppose I would if you hadn't mentioned it," said Marjorie, meekly.

At this moment there came a great clattering and shouting behind them, and Marjorie and the Dream stepped to one side of the road, out of the way of a small boy and a very unruly calf which he was trying to drive. He had a rope attached to the creature's neck; but its great activity had dragged the line through his hands until they were blistered and flayed. Just after passing them he managed to take a turn about a young tree by the wayside, and by so doing, to bring the unruly calf to a stop; and thereupon he began rubbing and blowing upon his injured hands.

"He is my brother, isn't he?" said Marjorie to the Dream, beginning to remove her gloves.

The Dream nodded his head.

Just then a carriage came in sight around a bend in the road, and in it were two handsomely dressed ladies. The carriage was driving slowly, and Marjorie became more deliberate in her movements; but at last the gloves were off, and just as the carriage was abreast of them,

she stepped up to the small boy, holding them out and smiling kindly.

"Here, little boy," she said, distinctly, "take my gloves. You need them more than I do."

The boy accepted the gift with much gratitude, and Marjorie walked on with her head quite high in the air.

"Don't you wish that your arms were longer?" asked the Dream, presently.

"Why?" asked Marjorie in surprise.

"So that you could pat yourself on the back."

Marjorie flushed. "You are unkind," she said, in a hurt tone. "I really did give them because the boy needed them."

"I know it," said the Dream; "but, nevertheless, there was, in the end, what I should call a mixed motive. But never mind, you have your new gloves."

Marjorie glanced down at her hands, and sure enough, there were gloves; but *such* gloves! Soiled, ragged, and ill-fitting!

Marjorie bit her lip as she looked at them. "Do you think that was fair?" she asked, at last. "My first thought was good."

"Well," said the Dream, "I think you got just about what was coming to you. Those

will keep your hands warm enough, and you learned something, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, soberly, "I learned what comes of giving 'to be seen of men'; but — but things hurt so!"

The Dream slipped his hand into hers for a moment. "It hurts to have a tooth pulled," he said; "but it can't ache after it's out."

Marjorie laughed a little, chokily. "I'm having some of my bad thoughts pulled," she said, "and I guess I'm glad, even if it does hurt some."

A short distance farther on, Marjorie noticed a little girl walking along on the other side of the road. She was walking slowly, with her head down, and did not look toward them or appear to be conscious of their presence. As they drew near, Marjorie saw that her dress, although of good material and prettily made, was dreadfully soiled and dirty, as if she had fallen in the mud, and that her hands and face bore similar marks. In fact, she looked so unattractive that Marjorie was beginning to be rather glad that she had not noticed them, when she raised her head and turned her face in their direction. It was not a pleasant face,

and looked hard and bitter, and there were soiled streaks upon the cheeks where tears had been wiped away with grimy hands. Marjorie shrank back a little; but the girl did not speak nor make any motion of coming nearer; only turned away her head again, holding it quite high now, and with her lips pressed tightly together.

Marjorie walked along slowly for a little way, then she stopped. "I'm going over there," she said to the Dream, and quietly crossing the road, she approached the little girl. "May I walk with you?" she asked.

The little girl did not turn her head or reply, but kept on her way, looking straight before her.

Marjorie caught step and walked beside her, silently. Presently she noticed that the tears were again running down the cheeks of her companion; but still she did not speak or turn her head.

Marjorie made a movement to come nearer, and then hesitated, for the soiled garments and hands made her dread closer contact; but she hesitated for only a moment, and then slipped her hand into that of the little girl. Still the child did not turn her face; but her fingers

tightened over Marjorie's, and with her other hand she wiped away the tears, which were coming faster.

For a long time they walked on in silence, and at last they came to a parting of the ways, and then the little girl released Marjorie's hand and turned her face, and Marjorie saw that all of the hardness and the bitterness had gone out of it.

"Good-by," said the little girl, "and thank you — dear."

"Good-by," said Marjorie, lovingly. "I am glad that we walked together," and with a parting smile she ran back to the Dream.

He greeted her cheerfully. "Been repairing your gloves, have you?" he asked, grinning.

"I guess I soiled them considerably more than they were," said Marjorie, glancing down at the one which had held the little girl's hand, and then she uttered an exclamation; for instead of being grimy and ragged, it had become white and whole, and fitted her hand perfectly.

"But — but I gave nothing," she said to the Dream, in surprise.

"Didn't you?" asked the Dream. "Are you sure?"

"No," Marjorie shook her head, positively. "I didn't give her a thing."

"I think that you did," said the Dream. "I think that you gave her a great deal. You gave her your hand, and that was what she needed more than anything else in the world."

Marjorie bent her head. "Perhaps it was," she said, softly.

And now a very cold wind began to blow through the tall pines, and Marjorie began to shiver once more, and her teeth to chatter. It seemed almost cold enough to snow, and the wind whirled her thin skirts about her and cut through her flimsy sleeves. She hugged her arms closely to her in a vain effort to keep warm; but she made no complaint.

Presently they saw, plodding along before them, a woman carrying a baby in her arms and leading by the hand a three-year-old boy. The youngster was very thinly clad, and his little bare feet and limbs were purple with the cold, and he was crying piteously.

Marjorie turned away her face as she passed them, her lips quivering and her eyes full of tears; but a moment later she stopped and

turned back, and taking the little child in her arms, she wrapped him in her skirt as well as she could, and holding him close to her breast, she walked along silently between the mother and the Dream

The child stopped crying quickly and snuggled down close to her, and very soon she began to feel warm and comfortable in spite of the chill wind which sang and sighed through the pine-trees; and then presently she noticed that the little one was wrapped in a soft fleecy white coat, and had grown warm and rosy; and as she shook out her skirt, she found folds of the same soft, fleecy stuff falling about herself; and it seemed to her that she could not remember what cold was.

After a time they parted with the little group, at the cross-roads, and Marjorie and the Dream walked on in silence for a long way. At last the Dream spoke.

"Are you thinking?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marjorie, "I am thinking about watching for my brothers on the way, and about motives. If your motive isn't good, you are uncomfortable in your heart, whether any other trouble comes of it or not; but if it is good,

then you can know that everything will be all right, and you needn't worry about results."

"What makes a good motive?" asked the Dream.

Marjorie thought for a moment. "Love," she said, at last, her eyes shining.

"Love for whom — for yourself?" asked the Dream.

"No," said Marjorie, softly, "for my brother." And then she added, with a little sigh, "Isn't it odd how hard it is to keep ourselves out of sight when we are doing for others?"

"Yes, but it's worth while," said the Dream, "even if it is hard."

"Yes," said Marjorie, "it surely *is* worth while."